

REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and following remarks, reconsideration of the rejections contained in the Office Action of May 19, 2004 is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1-5 and 9-12 as being unpatentable over Shimizu et al. in view of Oishi et al. and Perlov et al. However, the Examiner went on to indicate that the subject matter of claims 6-8, 13 and 14 would be allowable if redrafted into independent form.

Accordingly, claims 6 and 13 have now both been redrafted into independent form. As such, all of claims 6-8 and 13-14 should now clearly be in condition for allowance. Indication of such is respectfully requested.

However, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 also distinguishes over the prior art cited by the Examiner, as now amended.

In the present invention, noting for example Figs. 23A and 23B, dummy wafer stations 353 are disposed below the respective load-unload stages 2. Each of the dummy wafer stations 353 is capable of having one or more wafers, and can hold a dummy wafer for use in stabilizing a polishing cloth before a product wafer is processed and a quality control wafer to be delivered for confirming the status or condition of the polishing apparatus. Each dummy wafer station has a pair of wafer detecting sensors 354 to confirm the presence of a semiconductor wafer therein. Note also the discussion beginning at line 11 of page 40 of the specification.

Independent claim 1, the only independent claim remaining at issue, has now been amended to recite "a dummy wafer station for holding at least one dummy wafer or at least one quality control wafer." This feature is not disclosed or suggested by any of the references cited by the Examiner.

U.S. Patent 5,989,107 to Shimizu et al. (Shimizu) discloses a loading/unloading unit 21. It seems far from clear that Shimizu discloses at least three load-unload stages 21, however. It is clear that Shimizu neither discloses nor suggests a dummy wafer station as claimed in claim 1.

Oishi et al., U.S. Patent 5,655,954 (Oishi) was cited by the Examiner as disclosing a drying unit 25. Oishi et al. similarly fails to disclose or suggest a dummy wafer station. Oishi does disclose a pair of cassettes 16 from which wafers 11 are removed. However, there is no other discussion of anything in Oishi corresponding to a dummy wafer station as with the present invention.

The Examiner further cited Perlov et al., U.S. Patent 5,893,795 (Perlov) as including a robot 72 moving on a track 154. Perlov does include a loading apparatus 70 and a cassette loader 74 for transferring cassettes 80. A holding tub 76 can hold the cassettes 80. However, it is clear that Perlov does not disclose or suggest a dummy wafer station as claimed in claim 1.

Accordingly, it may be readily seen that all of the prior art cited by the Examiner fails to disclose or suggest a dummy wafer station.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that independent claim 1 clearly patentably distinguishes over each of Shimizu, Oishi and Perlov. Indication of such is respectfully requested.

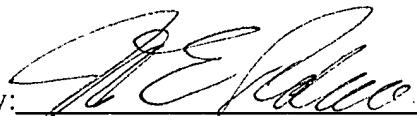
The Examiner commented at the bottom of page 3 of the Office Action that Shimizu discloses a partition between the polishing unit, the load-unload stages and the cleaning unit. However, Fig. 1 does not disclose or suggest any such partitions. As claims 11 and 12 in any case depend from allowable independent claim 1, this point is in any case moot.

The additional prior art references cited by the Examiner appear to be no more relevant to the present invention than the patents discussed above. Accordingly, no further discussion of these references would appear to be necessary at this time.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is submitted that the present application is now in condition for allowance, and the Examiner is requested to pass the case to issue. If the Examiner should have any comments or suggestions to help speed the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact Applicants' undersigned representative.

Respectfully submitted,

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November 19, 2004